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Viewing cable 08SANSALVADOR147, ARENA: FIVE CANDIDATES SURVIVE FIRST CUT

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Understanding cables

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- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. #**08SANSALVADOR147**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08SANSALVADOR147	2008-02-05 19:36	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy San Salvador

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.wikileaks.elfaro.net/es/201106/notas/4205/>

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 051936Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8972
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 000147

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [ES](#)
SUBJECT: ARENA: FIVE CANDIDATES SURVIVE FIRST CUT

REF: SAN SALVADOR 36

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires Michael A. Butler, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[¶1. \(SBU\) Summary:](#) ARENA's executive board announced the names

of five candidates who will continue in the party's competition to become ARENA's nominee for 2009 presidential elections. In a surprise to many observers, ARENA founding member Hugo Barrera was not among those moving on to the next phase of the contest. End Summary.

¶12. (SBU) On February 4, COENA (ARENA's Executive Board) announced that five of the eighteen candidates for the party's presidential nomination would continue to compete in the second phase of the selection process. During the next three weeks, the five remaining candidates will travel around El Salvador and invite ARENA members, business and industrial interests, religious groups and the general public to their own formal and informal events. During the third week of February, COENA expects to select three of the five candidates to travel around El Salvador and participate in televised debates and other events organized by the party. Then on March 15, nearly 3,000 party officials will vote to select the party's candidate for the Salvadoran Presidency.

¶13. (SBU) The five remaining candidates are Vice President Ana Vilma de Escobar; former Foreign Minister Francisco "Pancho" Lainez; former Legal Advisor to the President Luis Mario Rodriguez; former National Civilian Police (PNC) Director Rodrigo Avila; and ARENA founding member Eduardo Barrientos.

¶14. (C) The surprise in COENA's February 4 announcement was reducing the number of names for the next phase of selection to five from the expected six, and eliminating the name most observers in and outside the party expected to see: Hugo Barrera, founding member of the party, successful businessman, and former head of the Salvadoran Port and Airport Authority (CEPA). Sources close to Barrera darkly told PolCounts February 5 they suspected -- but could not prove -- this was due to fears among President Saca's inner circle, including Security Minister Figueroa, that they would have little control over a Barrera candidacy and that Barrera's strong support among ARENA's rank and file would catapult him to the front of the pack.

¶15. (SBU) In an informal poll of listeners on the popular "A Primera Hora" radio program February 5, listeners were asked whom they expected would ultimately become ARENA's candidate. Rodrigo Avila and Pancho Lainez were effectively tied, chosen by 31 and 30 percent of respondents, respectively. The rest of the candidates trailed considerably.

¶16. (C) Comment: The only surprise in COENA's February 4 announcement was its reduction to five the number of candidates that will move forward and the absence of Hugo Barrera, though we doubt he could have mounted an effective campaign against the FMLN's Funes.

¶17. (C) Comment continued: The anecdotal results from "A Primera Hora" match what we hear from San Salvador's chattering classes. They also match the views of President Saca, who told CDA February 5 that he expected either Avila or Lainez to be ARENA's candidate. Few believe VP Escobar or Barrientos will become ARENA's candidate. While Rodriguez benefits from his association with President Saca, he is handicapped by his tender age (35) and the fact that he was never a party activist. Both Avila and Lainez benefit from strong name recognition and significant support from power centers inside ARENA.

BUTLER